DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 068 442 SP 005 895

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TITLE	Overlander: A Study of Instructional Innovation Involving Beginning Teachers Attempting to Nongrade an Open-Area Elementary School.
INSTITUTION	Educational Research Inst. of British Columbia, Vancouver.
SPONS AGENCY	Educational Research Inst. of British Columbia, Vancouver.
PUB DATE	[72]
NOTE	47p.; Educational Research Institute of British Columbia, Report Number 9
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Beginning Teachers; Educational Innovation; Elementary Education; *Instructional Innovation; *Nongraded System; *Open Education; *Open Plan Schools; Program Descriptions

ABSTRACT

This report describes an instructional innovation program involving beginning teachers attempting to nongrade the Overlander Elementary School, British Columbia, Canada. Teacher training included weekly seminars, a weekend sensitivity experience, and a trip to California to observe schools operating under the nongraded system. The seminars centered around the ideas of nongrading, continuous progress, team-teaching, and open-area schools. Evaluation of the program involved student, parent, and staff response to questionnaires. Further evaluation was completed by two educators retained to provide a descriptive analysis of the school. Seven tentative conclusions are presented; further observations and conclusions will be made when the program is operating as completely as possible. Recommendations for further study are suggested. The appendix includes a building plan. (MJM)

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O V E R L A N D E R

A Study of Instructional Innovation Involving Beginning Teachers Attempting to Nongrade An Open-Area Elementary School.

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SP 005 895

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND . . . . . 1.

PROCEDURES . . . . . 3.

EVALUATION . . . . . 7.

STUDENT . . . . . 8.

PARENT . . . . . 10.

STAFF . . . . . 13.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM . . . . . 17.

CONCLUSIONS . . . . . 36.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY . . . . . 40.

TABLES

I. Student Questionnaire . . . . . 8A.

2. Parent Questionnaire . . . . . 10A.

APPENDIX A . . . . . 42.

BACKGROUND

This study had its real beginning in 1959 in the Hudson Elementary School District in Hacienda Heights, California.[1] Two schools decided they would nongrade their primary units. Twenty experienced and very capable primary teachers spent a full year in planning the instructional program they would attempt to implement during the following three years. This planning took various forms. Goodlad and Anderson's "The Nongraded School"[2] became their Bible and they studied and discussed it chapter by chapter in weekly seminars. They contacted every school district that claimed to have a nongraded system and secured whatever information about it that was available. Visitations were also made to schools in the Los Angeles area which claimed to have nongraded programs. Utilizing these resources they then constructed their conception of a nongraded primary.

The three years of attempting to implement the program were a continuous process of evaluation - modification - evaluation. The final empirical evaluation[3] showed no superi-

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[1]Dr. Oldridge was the Guidance Director of this district at this time and was in charge of evaluating the study.

[2]John I. Goodlad & Robert H. Anderson. The Nongraded Elementary School, New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.,1963.

[3]Hopkins, K.D.; Oldridge, O.A.; & Williamson, M.L. "An Empirical Comparison of Pupil Achievement and other Variables in Graded and Ungraded Classes." American Educational Research Journal, 2: 207-215, November 1965.

ority for their experimental program over the controls on any of the variables measured. In considering these outcomes those involved took another look at the instructional program they had hoped to implement. It was a general feeling that their instructional goals had not been reached to the extent they desired. In assessing what they believed to be the reasons for their lack of success, there was virtually unanimous agreement that they could not "nongrade" their thinking to the extent necessary to completely nongrade their instruction. Their past teaching practices were too well established and overly resistant to change.

This study helped identify two major problems which may account for much of the inconsistency of research findings in instructional methods. The first problem is that experienced teachers vary considerably in their abilities to discard past teaching practices for new innovative practices. The other problem is that too many researchers in instruction report outcomes without first fully describing their instructional objectives and then clearly establishing that these objectives were reached before evaluation took place.

Related to the concern over innovative instructional methods are the questions arising from innovative building designs. New school building construction in British Columbia is probably utilizing variations of an open-area design more than any other section of Canada or the United States. Virtually no studies have been done to assess the value of this

general configuration for varying instructional programs. Lower construction cost is about the only advantage for them to date that is supported by empirical evidence.

This study was designed with the problems or considerations mentioned above in mind. It would attempt to implement a nongraded instructional program in an open-area school staffed by beginning teachers and no evaluation of academic and social outcomes would be attempted until it was first established that the nongraded program was functioning according to the criteria which described it.

PROCEDURES

The first two problems facing the study were securing funds and locating a school district that would not only make a school available but would also allow the type of freedom and give the kind of support necessary for the project.

A study proposal was submitted to the Educational Research Institute for British Columbia for funding. The Institute granted the initial request for $5700 and alsc provided a supplemental grant of $700. Its support and interest in the project was most beneficial.

What loomed as the largest obstacle to the study turned out to be the smallest, thanks to a forward-looking school district. This project demanded an open-area school in which the staff would have freedom to establish their curricular goals and instructional program without direction from any

outside sources. When the Superintendent of Schools and the Chairman of the Board of School Trustees[4], School District 24, Kamloops, British Columbia, were approached on the possibility of the project, they expressed an interest and asked that a complete and detailed proposal be presented to the total Board of Trustees at its next meeting.

The proposal was made to the Board and, after careful consideration, it agreed to make Overlander Elementary School available for the project. Overlander was scheduled for first-stage completion (see appendix A) by September, 1968. The Board also agreed that the instructional program was to be established by the school staff and that school district personnel would only be involved when requested by the Overlander staff.

Next came the selection and preparation of the staff. Mr. Arnold Toutant was selected as the principal. At the time, he was a principal of one of the district's outlying schools and was the only staff member with previous teaching experience. The teaching staff consisted of eight students[5] selected from among twenty-one professional-year students in

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[4]Mr. Nelson Allen, Superintendent of Schools and Mr. David Summers, Chairman of the Board of School Trustees.

[5]Barbara Bellward, John Bethell, Richard Chandler, Catherine Hadgkiss, James Hinds, Marion Holloway, Valerie McIntyre, Isabel Sinclair.

elementary education in the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, who volunteered an interest in the project. The selection of the teaching staff was made by Kamloops school district personnel. The selection of the principal was made by the Director of Elementary Education, Kamloops School District, Mr. Archie Mercer, and the project director.

A very necessary and most helpful source of support was Dean Neville Scarfe of the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia. Also involved in the thinking through of the project and the preparation of the staff were the following members of the Faculty of Education: Professor Dorothy Rizer, Dr. Vera McKay, Dr. D.E. Allison and Dr. E.G. Fiedler.

The training period began in January and continued through April. The school staff and faculty advisors met during this time in weekly seminars. Included in the training period was a weekend sensitivity experience led by Dr. E.G. Fiedler.

The seminars centered around the ideas of nongrading, continuous progress, team-teaching and open-area schools. All the available literature and films on these areas were studied and discussed. During the period the group obtained the conceptual model of a nongraded school created by Dr. Dan M.

Purdom[6]. After much study and discussion of the model the group decided to make it their instructional goal. The remainder of the seminars then centered on the ways of organizing the entire instructional program and the various other aspects of the school's operation in order to implement this model.

The culmination of the training program was a trip to California to observe schools reported to be operating the nongraded system. While there, the group met Dr. Purdom, discussed the project and arranged for him tc evaluate it at the end of the first year's operation. Upon return the group spent the summer working informally on their curriculum.

The first day of school in September, 1968 saw approximately 215 students coming to register. About forty of these were native Indian children who had not attended public schools previously. The building was inadequate due to a freeze on some forms of school construction. (See Appendix A.) The building had still to have the ceiling installed. There were no desks, tables, or chairs in the school. However, school began.

The parents were involved early in the school year. The nongraded program was explained to them including the gen-

[6]Purdom, Daniel M. "A Conceptual Model of the Nongraded School". Unpublished doctoral dissertation, School of Education, University of California at Los Angeles, 1967.

erally accepted rationale underlying it. The use of team-teaching and how it might function in an open-area building was discussed. The assumptions for the use of beginning teachers were explained. The parents were told that the staff would try to establish a close and positive relationship between the school and the students. One way of accomplishing this was to allow the students in the building whenever at least one teacher was present. This included before school, and after school, at night, on the weekends and during the holidays. They would also be allowed to bring their pets to school. The staff also felt that controlling student behaviour by force or direct command would be at a minimum. They also told the parents that they expected many questions from them during the year and that they were welcome to come into the school at any time and discuss them.

EVALUATION

The evaluation of the total school program as well as the open-area building involved the students, parents and staff. There was about an 85% return on the questionnaires sent to parents and virtually a 100% return from the students.

The evaluation of the nongraded curriculum was designed to correct one of the common errors in research technique mentioned previously, i.e., measuring outcomes of an instructional program inferred to exist but for which no evidence is given that verifies its existence. It was agreed that only the pro-

cess (nongrading) would be evaluated and that no attempt would be made to assess products (cognitive and affective factors) until it could be shown that the desired nongraded program was in fact operating. To do this, Dr. Dan Purdom and Mrs. Patricia Clark were engaged to evaluate the extent to which the instructional program in Overlander School met the criteria of Dr. Purdom's model of a nongraded school.

STUDENT EVALUATION: Following are the questions and results of the student evaluation. It should be pointed out that the questionnaires were administered in the school by two university staff members in the absence of the teachers. Also they were given to the students in the sections above the primary grades. There were 132 responses - 67 boys and 65 girls. Table 1 lists the questions asked students and their responses expressed in percentages. The questions were designed to get their reactions to the total school program in general and specific reactions to the building and instructional program.

Questions to elicit a general reaction are numbers 2, 3, 8, 9, and 15. Their responses indicate that a definite majority of the students react in a favourable way to the total program of the school. It should be noted that on all questions the boys react more favourably than the girls.

Questions to elicit responses to the building are numbers 4, 5, and 6. Their responses indicate that a majority of the students do not see the structure of the building as a

TABLE I

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

	Girls		Boys		Total	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%
1. Have you gone to school in Overlander all this year?	75	25	82	18	78	22
2. Has going to Overlander been much different from other schools? In what way?	93	7	100		97	3
3. Have you enjoyed going to Overlander more than the last school you attended? What did you enjoy most?	67	33	83	17	75	25
4. Did you have much trouble getting used to the open-area building?	24	76	23	77	24	76
5. Would you rather go to school in this kind of a building than in one with classrooms?	60	40	71	29	66	34
6. Can you study as well in Overlander as you could in a regular classroom?	43	57	71	29	57	43
7. Do you feel you have learned as much this year as you did last year?	55	45	78	22	67	33
8. Do you feel you have had more freedom in school this year?	91	9	97	3	94	6
9. Do you believe the kind of freedom you have had in Overlander is good for students your age?	67	33	74	26	71	29
10. Do you like having more than one teacher working with you?	76	24	86	14	81	19
11. Are you getting to study more things this year that interest you, than you did last year?	67	33	86	14	77	23
12. Do you think you are having to learn a lot of things that won't help you much in the future?	37	63	18	82	28	72
13. Do the teachers expect you to do more school work than you can?	24	76	11	89	18	82
14. Do you feel you are getting more tests this year than you did last year?	33	67	12	88	23	77
15. Have you been absent from school more days this year than last year?	33	67	29	71	32	68

handicap - especially the boys.

Reactions to the instructional program were gained from questions 7, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14. A favourable majority response to the instructional program is indicated and again the boys show the stronger preference.

Students were allowed to elaborate on items 2 and 3. Some of their typical responses follow:

2. has going to Overlander been much different from other schools? YES NO

In what way?

"You don't get enough work done"

"You are more free and its funner to go to"

"Because there's too much noise"

"Well you don't have to do things you can't do"

"We have been able to work at our own speed without a teacher after you"

"It's open and there's more than one teacher"

"The teaching is different"

"You can talk and walk around and eat anytime"

"You get more privileges"

"It's all one big room"

3. Have you enjoyed going to Overlander more than the last school you attended? YES NO

What did you enjoy most?

"You can see your friends"

"The way we walk and talk around here"

"Everything but the library"

"You can go ahead in things like math and don't have to wait on the others"

"Being able to take the subjects and topics I wanted to"

"The rules"

"The teachers and the way they teach"

"Because you can work at your own speed"

"Eat gum"

"The responsibility"

PARENT EVALUATION

Table 2 contained the questions asked of the parents and their answers expressed in percentages. As in the student questionnaire the object of the questions was to determine how the parents felt about the total school program in general and their specific reactions to the building and instructional program.

The questions concerned with the total school program were numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9. From their responses, it is evident that a majority of the parents had a positive attitude towards the total school program.

Only question number 10 dealt with the design of the school. The responses indicate that a majority of the parents see the structure of the building in a favourable way.

Questions 5, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 dealt with the instructional program. The obtained results indicate that a majority of the parents are favourable to the instructional program of the school.

TABLE 2

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

	Yes %	No %	N.A. %
1. Do you feel that Overlander School is really different from the school(s) your child has attended before?	88	5	7
2. If "yes", do you feel the difference is an advantage for your child?	51	27	22
3. Has your child been absent from school more days this year than last year?	9	78	13
4. Is your child happier about going to school this year than before? (If this is his first year of school, don't answer.)	63	25	12
5. Do you feel your child has learned as much in Overlander as in other schools?	58	29	13
6. Has your child's behavior at home towards his family changed this year?	36	58	6
7. If yes, are you pleased with the change?	31	15	54
8. Do you know as much about Overlander School as other schools your child has attended?	72	13	15
9. Have you felt free to visit the school and ask questions? How many times did you visit? (For any reason) _____	87		13
10. Do you think the design of the building is desirable for a school?	62	30	18
11. Do you feel that the child becoming responsible is important? (If yes, answer 12.)	92	4	4
12. Do you feel your child has become more responsible for his learning?	58	29	13
13. Do you think having several teachers working with each child is good for the children?	92	4	4
14. Do you feel the school has taken a greater individual interest in your child this year?	74	14	12
15. As you know, the teachers in Overlander School are all beginning teachers. Do you feel this has handicapped your child's education this year?	5	81	14

The parents were also asked if they had visited the school and how many times - question 9. 69% of the parents responding had visited the school. These parents had averaged seven visits each during the school year.

In order to give the parents a chance to react to the school subjectively, three open-ended statements were included.

These statements and a sample of their typical responses follow:

1. Specific things you like about the school:

"The interest taken in the children individually"

"I like the way the teachers are all so helpful and cooperative with parents and pupils"

"The enthusiasm of the teachers about everything was really tremendous"

"I like the way Mr. Toutant handles any problems immediately and very nicely. . ."

"The relaxed atmosphere and the numerous educational tools and projects"

"Self-discipline"

"The fact that children learn to be independent and think for themselves"

"Being free to visit at any time"

"The idea of several teachers for special subjects - eliminates class favourites"

"I think everything about the school is nice"

2. Specific things you dislike:

"More space is needed for the children who wish to work in quieter surroundings"

"No dislikes but still not convinced that teachers can get childrens' full attention with this design of school"

"Lack of orderliness (noise and confusion). Very distracting even to a disciplined mind"

"Not enough strict discipline"

"Grading - no comparison to other children as to a class average"

"Too much freedom, far too noisy"

"No specific amount of work assigned"

"Movable walls should be installed"

"Continued pressure from the teaching staff to involve the parents in school activities"

3. Additional comments:

"Our child found it extremely difficult to concentrate due to the open area group teaching, and we feel he did not work to his potential. Our child shares the same opinion and does not wish to return to an open-area school"

"I hope and believe this school is teaching my children to be better prepared to face society and I hope my children will have a better idea of what they wish to be or do for a living when that time comes. If they are happy at it they can't help but be good at it. My children are more talkative now and wish to express themselves - they seem to have a greater drive to do something new or different without their being afraid it is too difficult"

"I feel that my children would have to continue in this plan at least another year to be able to begin to know whether there is an advantage or not in an open-area teaching".

STAFF EVALUATION

1. Reactions to the open-area building in terms of:

A) Discipline or student control.

There was a general agreement that student control in the open-area was a potential problem, however, the problem could be related about as much to the type of instructional program as to the building. The openness did allow for more visual and auditory distraction and this had its greatest effect on those who were not as highly motivated towards school learning.

The individualization of instruction, work with small groups, and somewhat random seating of students demanded that the teachers make extra efforts to maintain visual contact with the students. Had the desks been arranged traditionally in close rows and the students taught in large groups this would have made control easier. However, this would have been contrary to the staff's intent to help the students develop self-control within a more relaxed environment.

It was generally felt that during the year the great majority of the students responded to this environmental approach and that control and discipline were no more difficult than in the traditional school setting.

B) Suitability for nongraded instruction.

The staff was unanimous in the opinion that open-area is highly conducive to nongrading. It provides for the most flexible type of grouping without labelling children. Multi-age groups can be easily formed and disbanded at will and, where team teaching is employed, there are no stigmas attached as the teachers are not identified with particular age or grade levels.

C) Suitability for team teaching.

Team teaching in Overlander was not of the more common practice of having a "master" teacher take the entire group for a lesson and then breaking down into smaller groups for discussion. This approach would have been physically difficult due to accoustical factors and also would have been incompatible with the nongraded instructional program which stressed individualization based on ability and interest.

Team teaching consisted of three teachers working with a group composed of an age span of three years. Team one had 6-7-8 year olds; team two had 8-9-10 year olds; and team three had 10-11-12 year olds and over. Each team was responsible

for the total program of its group.

The staff all agreed that open-area is highly facilitative if not mandatory for this kind of team teaching. It enabled the teaching team to have immediate and constant communication with its group of students and with itself. It allowed for the flexibility of forming and disbanding groups that was vital to this instructional program. The staff felt their concept of nongraded team teaching could not have been carried on without the open-area building.

D) Recommended changes in the present building to facilitate any of the above.

The staff felt the need for back-up rooms to be used as seminar areas and for small activity groups. They also felt that some wall dividers for establishing small instructional areas would be helpful - and also a gymnasium. The changes they recommended have now been made to the building - including the gymnasium. (See appendix A.)

2. A) Reactions to having been in a study such as this as a beginning teacher.

Although none felt that the year had been the educational success they had hoped for, they still were glad for having had the opportunity to be involved in an innovative teaching experience.

B) What could have been done in terms of selection and training to improve this year's experience?

No one felt that the absence of previous teaching experience proved to be the solution for implementing an innovative program. Although their vitality and enthusiasm was high and most helpful, the lack of knowledge about basic instructional factors was a handicap. All seemed to agree that the big problem centered around interpersonal relations. Several, including the principal, recommended that prior to taking over a school, it would have been helpful to have had the total staff in a teacher training situation involving the actual teaching of children. It was their feeling that no matter how much you see, read,or hear, you need to try it at the same time you are studying. They also felt that this period would offer a chance to see how the staff members related to one another. It would also provide opportunity to change prospective members until a highly compatible group was established. They felt this latter factor was the most crucial determiner of the success or failure of this kind of a project.

3. Give your reactions to the practice of nongrading.
The response to nongrading was unanimous and positive. All agreed in the opinion that, when properly implemented, it would be the most beneficial instructional procedure for children. They became highly committed to its principles but none claimed they had all been achieved. The principal, Mr. Toutant, says it best - "Thus, it would be dishonest to

say we did more than identify some of the aspects of nongradedness during the year and set out the work we need to do in the future."

4. In what ways has the teacher training program at U.B.C. prepared you for this experience and in what ways has it failed to prepare you?

The responses to this question, for the most part, were critical. One teacher felt that the program had been beneficial in that the psychology and sociology courses had been useful in a general way. Also, that the methods courses provided an introduction to their areas. Another teacher found her special education courses offered the most help.

Most stated that there had been no training experiences or discussions related to nongrading, team teaching, or open-area schools. Continuous progress and individualized instruction were also omitted. Demonstration lessons were in the traditional classroom with the teacher giving a lesson to the total class with no apparent allowances for individual differences. Needed preparation in parent/teacher conferences and the dynamics of the teacher/pupil relationship were not included. Several wished they could now repeat the fifth year as they could at least ask the right questions.

EVALUATION OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM:

PREFACE

In May of the Overlander Elementary School's first year

of operation a team of two educators was retained to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's open-area, nongraded instructional program: Dr. Daniel Purdom, Associate Professor, University of South Florida, and Mrs. Patricia Clark, Administrative Assistant, Fountain Valley School District, Fountain Valley, California.

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the extent to which the school's actual operational model fitted the conceptual model defined in Dr. Purdom's 1967 dissertation at U.C.L.A. In addition the evaluation represented an attempt to provide feedback to those involved in the project.

The three day evaluation began on 19th May and extended through 21st May, 1969. The time was utilized in the following manner:

- orientation to program, personnel, facilities and phases of evolution.
- planning the evaluation process and techniques for use of the Purdom Model as an instrument for evaluation.
- gathering data.
- analysing and compiling results.
- reporting back to participating professional staff.

The evaluation team used a number of techniques to gather pertinent data:

- observation of teaching-learning situations.
- interviews with students, staff, parent aide, administrator and consultant.

- examinations of student work, instructional materials, and various school records.

The investigators were chiefly concerned with providing a descriptive analysis of the school in relation to the conceptual model. This report was therefore an attempt to render an objective description of "what is" rather than "what is required".

SCHOOL FUNCTION

Proposition 1: The school assists each learner in developing his potentialities to the maximum.

Supporting Evidence:

- Check lists of basic skills to be mastered e.g., Language Arts skills, Arithmetic skills, Social Studies concepts.
- Teacher comments:

  "I want to get across some content - some number facts."

  "If a child isn't working up to his potential I put my foot in. For example, I won't let him keep using the same vocabulary."
- Report card emphasizes the development of academic areas.
- The schedule of the school day is centered around four subject matter areas: Arithmetic, Language Arts, Social Studies, Science.
- Teacher assignments stress academic areas first and then allow students to explore in other areas.
- Concerted efforts to provide opportunities to explore interests and identify potentiality by making the environment as rich as possible and then giving time to explore.

Conclusion:

At present the school appears to have a dual function, rather than giving priority to maximizing potentialities. Its purpose seems to be both that of developing literacy and assisting learners to maximize their potentialities. Predetermined curricula, in the form of skills and concepts to be mastered, supports the contention that the school operates to develop literacy. Freedom, provision for exploring interests, and goal setting give evidence of moving toward the development of the wide range of potentialities found among a school's population.

CURRICULUM

Proposition 2: The Curriculum emphasizes the development of the broad structural concept and modes of inquiry of the disciplines.

Supporting Evidence:

- Concept lists and skill cards (eg., in Arithmetic, Science, Social Studies, Language Arts) reflect emphasis on facts, low-level concepts and broad generalizations.
- Student records indicate progress in relation to skills and concepts.
- Comments reflecting emphasis on facts: "My teacher wants us to know all the times tables by the end of the year." (pupil).

  "We're studying. . . unit to get them to read about it." (teacher).
- Comments reflecting skills, and low level and broad concepts:

"Learning of research skills is the important thing in Social Studies" (teacher).
"We use this text book over that text because it treats the principles." (teacher).
"The objective is for a lesson to develop a concept." (teacher).

- Instructional materials such as tapes, curriculum guides, filmstrips, textbooks and workbooks were geared to the development of facts and concepts.

Conclusion:

There is a definite, observable attempt being made to develop low level and broad concepts. This is best evidenced by the staff's identification of concepts and production of concept lists and skill charts in various subject matter fields.

At times, facts were used to develop low level concepts and broad generalizations. At other times acquisition of factual information did not seem explicitly related to broader concepts. For example, learners were sometimes collecting isolated bits of information about interest projects without deliberate procedures built in to insure that the learner move beyond the acquisition of knowledge to comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation levels of operation.

INSTRUCTION

Proposition 3: Learning opportunities are provided on the basis of individual needs, interests, and abilities.

Supporting Evidence:

- Individuals use differentiated materials and methods.
- Individuals are permitted to pursue differentiated interests.
- Differentiated objectives are frequently formulated on individual basis.
- Assignment of topics and units to the group as a whole.
- Group-assigned unit or topic with opportunities provided for individual needs and interests within the given topic.
- Common expectation for all learners in the group (team or class) to function at the same level of independence.
- Common expectation for all to master common sets of skills or concepts.
- Teacher comments: (to a group of approximately 25 children)

  "I'm going to...(do it this way) so everybody has to get it."

  "These are the basic things we want to teach all children." (referring to concept chart)

  "We had a majority vote. Everyone had to go along with the majority."

  "The amount of the retrieval of materials is severely limited. Especially if the student plans it, lack of accessibility limits spontaneity."
- Use of identical materials for learners on a similar level of instruction.
- Student comment: "I don't want to go through all the steps but he says I have to. I can get the same answer without (Uniform procedures based on group norms) doing it his way, but he says it'll help me."

Conclusion:

The investigators believe that learning opportunities are provided in relation to some combination of group needs and interests.

In many instances during the observation period, there was evidence of a major attempt to differentiate learning opportunities according to individual needs and interests. Particular arithmetic classes, individual projects and self-selective reading were notable examples.

There was however, a tendency to standardize materials and methods, when youngsters were grouped together because of a similar level of achievement. The range of alternatives at varying levels of proficiency was severely restricted.

INSTRUCTION

Proposition 4: All phases of human growth are considered when making decisions about how to work effectively with a learner.

Supporting Evidence:

- Student tendency toward early withdrawal from instructional tasks.
- Instances of student frustration with opportunity provided.
- Instances of careless approach to task at hand.
- High degree of distractability in students at large.
- Student comments: "I kept feeling sick at Arithmetic -- so my teacher let me read during that period. She thought maybe I didn't like Arithmetic and I was nervous."

- Teacher comments:

  "For this girl, it's more important to get her over her upset than worry about school work."

  "My prime goal is to make kids happy with themselves -- and happy with school -- able to work with others."

  "I often group by sex and friendship."

  "Self-satisfaction is important."

  "My idea of curriculum relates to the interests and maturity of the kids."

  "The emotional side of the senior student is most important."

- Assignment to groups on the basis of peer relationships and independence in learning.

- Placement of youngsters with a particular teacher of team because of social or emotional factors.

- Use of assessment instruments to collect data concerning intellectual maturity and academic growth.

- Evaluation techniques (such as student survey sheets) used to determine interests and attitudes.

- The presence of personal pets in the classroom seems to reflect a concern for affective development.

Conclusion:

In all areas of the curriculum, only certain phases of human growth are considered when making decisions about how to work effectively with a learner. The evidence seems to suggest predominant consideration for data related to intellectual and social development, with less concern for emotion-

al and physical development.

There were both formal and informal procedures for collecting data. More data were recorded regarding cognitive development than any other area.

INSTRUCTION

Proposition 5: Learning opportunities are paced so that each child can progress in relation to his own rate of development in each area of the curriculum.

Supporting Evidence:

- Use of audio-visual aids which the learner can control in accordance with his rate (e.g., listening post, filmstrip centers, etc.)
- Teacher comments: "I'm going to go slow so everybody has to get it." (treating a class of twenty-six as a unit).
- Student records (daily schedules, etc.) which reflect self-pacing.
- Observation of students progressing through materials and experience at their own rate in both independent and teacher guided situations.
- Open-ended terminal times for assignments.
- Teacher records which reflect individual rates of progress (e.g., number of pages read, number of arithmetic pages completed in a given period of time.)

Conclusion:

The investigators believe that the school came very close to completely complying with this proposition. There were, however, cases observed in which the group rate of

learning regulated an individual's progress.

EVALUATION

Proposition 6: An evaluation of all phases of human growth is made for each individual.

Related Evidence:

- Teacher-kept records showing students' academic development -- skill check list for each student.
- Individual student books of corrected assignments.
- Specimens of informal teacher-constructed surveys of student feelings and attitudes.
- Use of self-checking of academic growth.
- Diagnostic testing of subject matter proficiencies.
- Use of peer relationships as one criterion for grouping.
- Using student attitudes toward particular teachers as a criterion for group placement.
- Using academic achievement as a criterion for grouping.
- Students reporting academic progress to teachers in pupil teacher conferences.
- Standardized mental maturity tests administered.
- Observed wide range achievement test in reading being administered.
- Teacher remarks concerning their observations of individual students' social and emotional growth.

Conclusion:

The basis for teacher decisions regarding placement of individuals in groups sometimes reflected consideration

of social, emotional, and physical as well as intellectual factors. However, the means for gathering data in physical, emotional, and social growth were less formal and systematic than the means used to determine intellectual growth.

EVALUATION

Proposition 7: Evaluation of each learner's progress is carried on almost constantly.

Related Evidence:

- Parent aide checks younger student's work daily as they complete assignments.
- Teacher and student records revealing that some areas are assessed every day or every few days, e.g., math, and some academic areas are assessed less frequently e.g., Social Studies.
- Standardized test administered to all students in a class in September and readministered again in December to those making a questionable score on the first test.
- Self-checking devices (answer sheets, teacher manuals with answers to problems, etc.) provided for students to use checking complete assignments.
- Data recorded sporadically in regard to certain developmental areas of growth -- e.g., emotional growth and social growth.
- Scarcity of data pertaining to physical development.
- Ad hoc grouping based on "fresh" data concerning pupil growth.
- Erratic use of teacher/pupil conferences as a means of continually collecting data.

Conclusion:

The investigators found that some attempt was being made, either formally or informally, to evaluate each learner's progress. There were varying degrees of frequency in evaluation of both curricular areas and developmental growth areas. For some curricular and growth areas, evaluation was conducted sporadically; for other areas it was carried on almost constantly. Systematic procedures for frequently appraising all areas was lacking. (Purdom)

The investigators found it difficult to reach a conclusion regarding the status of the school in regard to this proposition. The evidence did not reveal a definite trend or pattern.

Some instructional areas encouraged frequent self-evaluation; others were almost never evaluated. Therefore it was difficult to draw a valid conclusion. For example, evaluation in Mathematics and Language Arts appeared to be more frequently conducted by some teachers than aspects of physical growth. (Clark)

EVALUATION

Proposition 8: The adequacy of each child's progress is an individual matter determined by appraising his attainments in relation to estimates of his potential.

Related Evidence:

- Report cards describing the teachers judgement of the child's progress in individual terms.

- Teacher remarks about a child's progress of individual potential rather than group norms.
- Student comment: "(My teacher) wants us to know all the times tables by the end of the year".
- Same level of performance expected for all those in a reading group.
- Pupils expressed lack of knowledge pertaining to adequacy of progress.
- Depth and maturity level of the child's work was compared to expectancies based on the results of aptitude and ability tests.
- Teacher comment: "Classmates evaluate presentations on specific (uniform) standards."
- The practice of contrasting the individuals' earlier achievements with his later achievement as a basis for judging progress.
- Lack of remarks in records regarding adequacy of progress in certain aspects of development; e.g., physical and emotional.

Conclusion:

The evidence collected suggested to the investigators that for the most part the adequacy of each child's progress is determined by comparing his attainments to estimates of his own potential. The staff has come very close to fully complying with this proposition of the model. However, the adequacy of a child's progress in some areas of the curriculum is determined by comparing his attainments to the attainments deemed appropriate for groups of learners. In some instances, no attempt is made to judge the adequacy of a child's progress.

ORGANIZATION

Proposition 9: The school is organized to facilitate continuous and cumulative learning for each learner over his total years in school.

Related Evidence:

- Multi-aged instructional groups -- youngsters representing several ages working at same level of instruction.
- Concept lists and skill charts which are planned to trace individual progress over several years of schooling.
- Self-pacing through textbooks permitted and encouraged.
- Student comment: "...can use which ever ones (textbooks) you want."
- Multi-level materials available for use by all learners in school.
- Assignments to groups on the basis of individual learning problems and ability.
- Records which record continuous pupil progress are immediately accessible to all personnel who work with the learner over a period of years.
- Lack of terminal points for achieving objectives.
- Instances in which group placement is somewhat static.
- Lack of consistency in keeping records up to date in all areas of growth and development.
- Team teaching and open-area designed to increase range of alternatives available to students.

Conclusion:

The physical facilities, cooperative arrangement of staff and administrative procedures all focus on facilitating continuous learning. Children are assigned to groups on the basis of their developmental characteristics and groups encompass children spanning several ages of a developmental phase.

ORGANIZATION

Proposition 10: The school is so structured that there are alternate learning environments available to the individual, and opportunities within these environments to progress at different rates and work at different levels in each area of the curriculum.

Related Evidence:

- Alternatives within the learning environment -- e.g., filmstrips, textbooks, worksheets, live animals, etc.
- Opportunities for both independent work and small group work.
- Opportunities to work with different teachers -- children are able to work with different teachers on the basis of their request opportunities to work with different peer groups.
- Student comment: "...can use which ever ones (textbooks) you want".
- Instances observed where children of a particular age essentially limited to working with one teacher.
- All students had to work in open-area -- no provision for other types of environment, e.g., isolated areas.

Conclusion:

The school is generally characterized by an organizational structure which offers multiple placements in terms of teaching style and peer group situation as well as subject matter. The school is structured so that there are usually several different kinds of situations in which a child may pursue interests and develop potentialities. Children often progress in each curricular area on the basis of their individual achievement.

ROLE OF THE LEARNER

Proposition 11: Each learner uses his own interests and needs to establish the objectives he will pursue.

Related Evidence:

- Freedom to depart from district curriculum guides.
- Teacher assignments to small instructional groups (arithmetic groups, language arts groups, science classes, etc.)
- Copies of daily plans formulated by students -- sometimes these plans were students determined and sometimes cooperatively (teacher and student) determined.
- Student selection of independent projects.
- Teacher comment: "Let's learn something about south of the equator."
- Skill charts and concept lists which identify skills and concepts that must be mastered.
- Student comment: "(We) had a majority vote, everyone had to go along with the majority."

- Student remarks that she had selected an activity because it was easy to complete.
- Student comment: "(My teacher) wants us to know all the times tables by the end of the year."
- Teacher comment: "I don't give them too much choice. I tell them. They need to learn to read basically. I decided which skills they were weak in."
- Teacher comment: "My goal is to get them to find information themselves; to give them a vocabulary."
- Teacher comment: "My initial aim was to open the children up -- get them talking."
- Student comment: "I don't want to go through all the steps but -- (teacher's name) says I have to."

Conclusion

The teachers determine some of the objectives the learners will pursue. The teacher and learner cooperatively determine some objectives. And, the learner is given the opportunity to determine some of the objectives he will pursue.

The investigators believed that often learners were given the freedom and responsibility to determine their objectives but they had not fully mastered the skills necessary to adequately establish goals. Consequently, learners formulated goals and devised plans that reflected a lack of careful and rational development.

CLOSING REMARKS

The investigators had originally hoped to summarize their findings in a graphic profile. This profile intended to illustrate degrees of compliance with each proposition in the model ---ranging from "no compliance" to "fully complying".

Further exploration of this procedure led the investigators to the conclusion that such labels as "no compliance", "moderately complying" and "fully complying" would be ambiguous and perhaps undermine the purpose of the conclusions.

Therefore it was decided to simply indicate those propositions which reflected the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Areas of Strength:

Proposition 5 - the pacing of learning opportunities on an individual basis.

Proposition 8 - judging a child's progress in terms of his individual ability.

Proposition 10- provision for alternative learning environments.

Areas of Weakness:

Proposition 6 - evaluation of all phases of growth and development.

Proposition 7 - constant and systematic evaluation practices.

Proposition 11- formulation of objectives by the learner.

It should be noted that the conceptual model represents an ideal which will no doubt take years of concentrated effort to bring to fruition. The investigators commend the staff, the principal Mr. Arnold Toutant, and the consultant to the project Dr. Buff Oldridge for their willingness to confront the basic issues of education embodied with the model.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the major purposes of this study originally was to determine the effectiveness of beginning teachers to implement an innovative program by contrasting them with experienced teachers attempting the same task. This has not been possible as the school district that was to make the contrast school and staff available was unable to construct the building because of financial limitations. Therefore, the conclusion regarding beginning teachers can only be based on the findings and opinions available.

1. A school teaching staff composed of all beginning teachers can implement an innovative instructional program to the extent that its unique characteristics are indentifiable by students, parents and trained observers.

   This conclusion is not meant to infer that the nongraded model was fully implemented, as it was not. However, it does infer that the propositions of the model were indentifiable by the instructional practices regularly occurring in the school. The responses of students and parents to the questions about the instructional program consistently support this conclusion.

   The evaluation by Dr. Purdom and Mrs. Clark, while pointing out the weaknesses and strengths of the instructional program in relation to the proposi-

tions of the model, would support the conclusion. Support could also be drawn from Dr. Purdom's statement that what was taking place in Overlander School was years ahead of any elementary school he had seen.

2. <u>The lack of previous teaching experience is not seen by students, parents or teachers as a handicap</u>.

This is supported by a majority of student responses to questions indirectly related to it. Their added comments about the quality of teaching taking place also supports the conclusion.

Parents were asked this question directly (no.15). 81% felt it was no handicap: 14% didn't express an opinion; and only 5% felt it was a handicap.

The staff generally agreed that this had been a valuable experience to have had in their first year of teaching. There were difficulties but these were not due as much to lack of teaching experience as they were to staff selection and training procedures.

3. <u>The use of beginning teachers in implementing innovative instructional procedures is supported to the extent that this procedure should be given further consideration and study</u>.

The evidence supporting conclusions one and two would apply here. Also, the suggestions by the

principal and several teachers that changes in the selection and training of the staff would probably eliminate several of the major problems encountered in this study and thus improve the procedure when used in future studies.

4. Open-area instructional space can provide an acceptable and adequate learning environment for elementary school children.

The majority of students indicated that they had little difficulty in adjusting to this new school environment and that they actually preferred it to the traditional classroom. It should be noted, however, that more girls than boys felt studying in Overlander was more difficult. Now that the building has been completed and smaller separated study areas have been provided this difficulty may be corrected for most of the children. The staff has felt that most of the instructional problems could have been eliminated had the building been completed and these additional spaces available.

5. Open-area instructional space is virtually mandatory for the kind of team teaching approach to a nongraded instructional program utilized in the Overlander School.

The staff was unanimous in its conviction that the nongraded program offered the greatest educational advantages for children. They found that team teaching

would be necessary for reaching that goal and it could only function with the flexibility offered by open-area space.

6. The boys demonstrated a consistent preference over the girls for the instructional program operating in this open-area school.

The boys responded in a more favorable way to every item on the questionnaire. It has long been recognized that traditional elementary school education was geared to the girls more than to boys. It appears, however, that what occurred in Overlander this past year has reversed this considerably. This could well be the most significant finding of this study and warrants further inquiry.

7. Selection of staff is probably the most crucial factor in the operation of an open-area school.

The Overlander staff felt strongly that a feeling of unity, respect, and cooperation is most necessary in an open-area teaching situation. This is especially so when an innovative program is being attempted that demands constant total staff planning, implementing, evaluating and modifying. The open-area also places all staff members in constant physical proximity to each other and to the students. These demands plus others, call for careful selection of staff. Under no

conditions would it be justified to arbitrarily assign staff members to an open-area school.

LIMITATIONS OF THE CONCLUSIONS

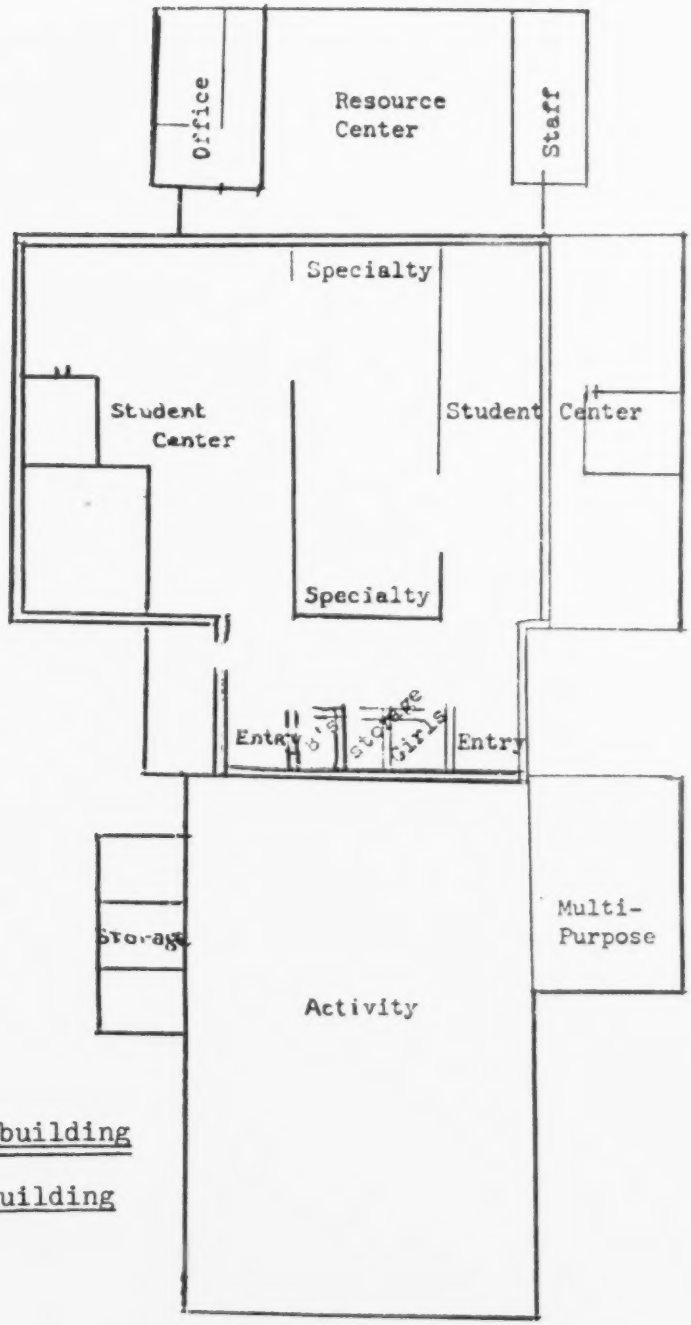
It is probably apparent to many that findings and conclusions related to academic achievement are not in this report. This is because these factors will not be assessed until it is determined that the nongraded program is operating as completely as can reasonably be expected. At the time the information for this report was obtained the program had not reached that point. When it does, these factors will be evaluated. All observations and tentative appraisals to this point indicate that academic progress is at least comparable to the general expectancy of the Kamloops School District.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. It is recommended that the evaluative procedures employed in this study be repeated at the end of the third year of school operation. If these findings indicate adequate congruence between the actual instructional program and the nongraded model then evaluation should be initiated into academic, social, and affective areas of pupil behaviour.

2. This study has served to increase interest in the use of beginning teachers in innovative instructional procedures. With the experience gained in staff selection and training further use of this procedure seems warranted and desired.

APPENDIX A



Original building

Present building

PUBLISHED BY THE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF B.C.

B.C. RESEARCH BUILDING, 3650 WESBROOK CRESCENT, VANCOUVER 8, BRITISH COLUMBIA